



## Naming Brief

A framework to help organise your approach to developing a brand name for your company.



# How to use this guide.

If you're starting a company, or launching a product or service, this guide can help you make some important decisions when developing a name for your new venture. Use this guide as a starting-point for conversations with your other business partners and decision makers around what ideas you want the name to convey, how it might sound and how it might be constructed.

You should complete and discuss this brand naming brief with everyone who will have a final say on the name of your new brand, in order that clear direction and naming criteria can be agreed upon from the outset.

When you get to the stage of name generation, you may choose to do this in groups, or as individuals, before reconvening and working towards a short-list.

You can explore various techniques and methods in this guide to help you generate a longer list of names, and then use the Name Qualities tool (inspired by an original concept by Rob Meyerson) to 'score' your short-listed names, before submitting your short-list to legal professionals for trademark checks.

## Why is a brand name important?

Language is a powerful tool, and in the arena of naming, a well chosen brand name can immediately shape the perception of your company.

Your name is the first thing a person will learn about your company, and it is the element of your brand that possesses the most longevity.

Without a name there is no brand. For this reason, the more considered, interesting and impactful your brand name, the more scope there is to develop a memorable brand identity system to complement it.

A well thought-out company name will outlive your website design, your visual identity refreshes, social media campaigns and advertising. The right name will suggest positive attributes to your audience, and should be unique, memorable and representative of the impression your company is trying to make.

Therefore investing in a considered and resonant brand name will help your business meet its goals.

### **Remember:**

The name is the element of your brand with the most longevity.

The name is the element of your brand that is most frequently remembered.

Interesting and memorable names can lead to more interesting brand identities.

A brand name can suggest certain qualities and create positive perceptions.

# What makes a good brand name?

There are many definitions and ideas around what makes a 'good' brand name, but as a rule a name should be memorable and distinctive, be easy to pronounce, and sound good to the ear.

Rob Meyerson, author of the book *'Brand Naming: The Complete Guide to Naming your Company, Product, or Service'* cites three qualities that a name should possess. These qualities are Creative, Strategic and Technical, each of which are broken down into three sub-qualities.

I have added a fourth category, 'Cultural' which can help you sense-check any names for negative connotations, slang, or general unsuitability during the selection process. This category also asks you to consider if your target audience would find your proposed name appealing and if the name is, in fact, suitable for its intended purpose or industry.

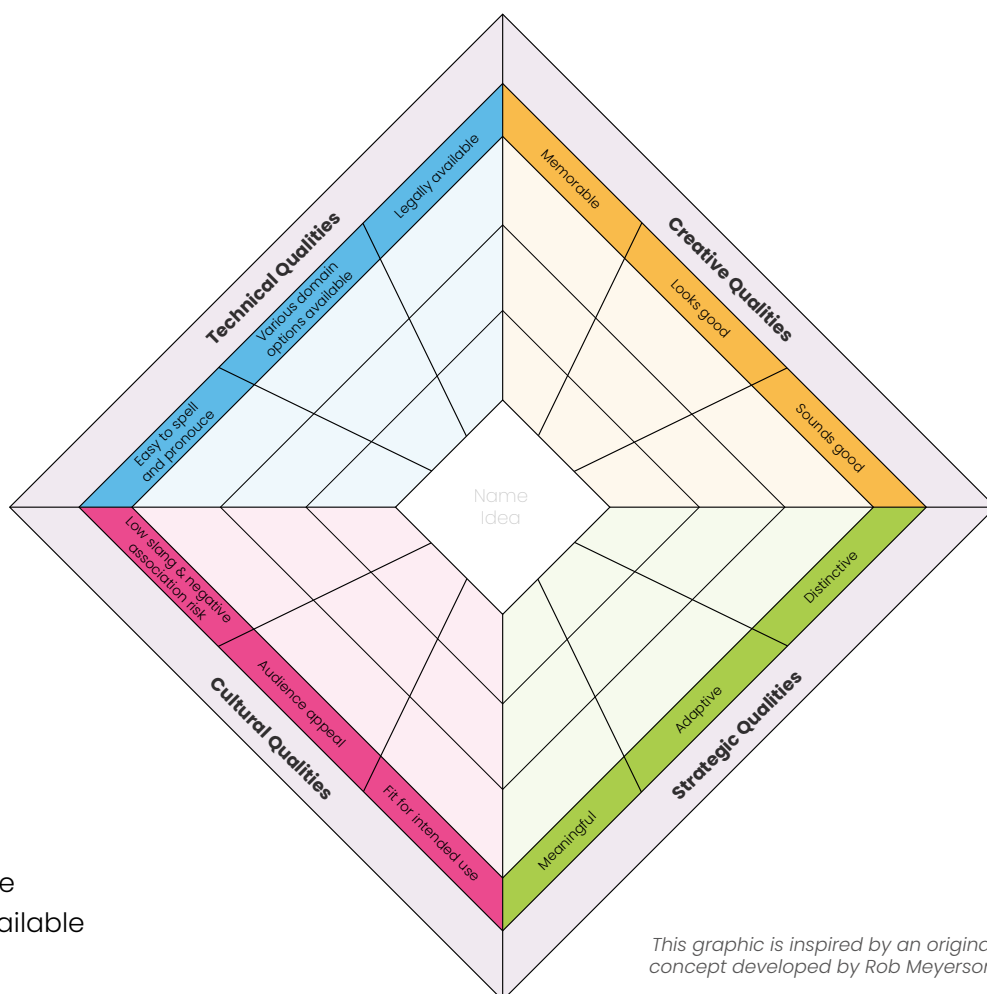
Assessing qualities under the Cultural banner can be based on instinct rather than any in-depth audience research, and can be considered a form of 'sense-checking' prior to submitting any names for a short-list.

Note that checks under the Technical Qualities banner should be completed toward the end of the process, once you have assessed Creative, Strategic and Cultural Qualities. Names that score well on these first three categories can then be short-listed for Technical checks.

Scoring your potential names using the tool below will be done in advance of submitting your names to your legal teams for proper legal checks. Don't strive for perfection across *all* criteria, rather use the tool as a barometer to see which names seem more suitable than others.

Remember, it will be almost impossible for a brand name to score 'top marks' in all of these qualities, but it is a handy guide for assessing the overall quality of a brand name.

- 1 Creative Qualities:**
  - Memorable
  - Looks good
  - Sounds good
- 2 Strategic Qualities:**
  - Meaningful
  - Adaptable
  - Distinctive
- 3 Cultural Qualities:**
  - Low slang & negative association risk
  - Audience appeal
  - Fit for intended use
- 4 Technical Qualities:**
  - Easy to spell and pronounce
  - Various domain options available
  - Legally available

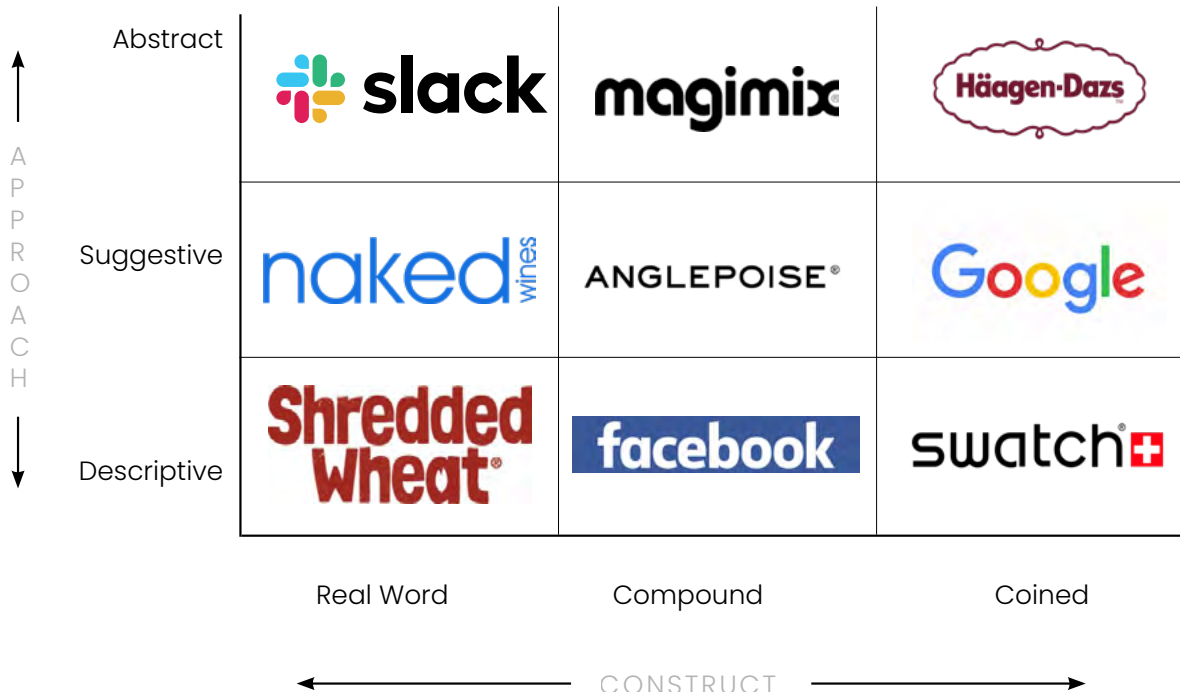


*This graphic is inspired by an original concept developed by Rob Meyerson*

# How could a brand name be approached and constructed?

The graphic below shows a common framework used by naming agencies to place names on a axis of approach and construct.

You can use this framework when deciding how to approach your own brand name.



Referencing the 'Real Word' column you'll note that 'Shredded Wheat' is entirely descriptive of the product with zero ambiguity, and uses the real words 'shredded' and 'wheat'.

Moving up the real word column we have 'Naked Wines'. Again the name uses the real words 'Naked' and 'Wines' but is more suggestive of certain desirable qualities (such as organic and chemical-free) with the use of the word 'naked'.

Lastly at the top of the real word column, we have Slack, the project management software. A real word yet abstract in the context of the product, as it is neither descriptive nor suggestive of the product it represents.

In the centre of the axis, we have Anglepoise, a compound name of the separate words Angle and Poise, which is also suggestive inasmuch as it's telling you you can 'poise', or set the angle of the light.

At the top of the coined column we have Haagen-Das. Coined names are invented or made-up names, and in this example Haagen-Das is in fact completely abstract, neither describing or suggesting anything about the product it represents. The word Haagen-Das is in fact completely meaningless, and chosen simply because the founder of the ice cream company thought it sounded upmarket and exotic.

Other kinds of names (which are seen frequently in the professional service industry) include initialisms, acronyms and founder based names. An initialism is the first letter of a series of words (for example, Smith, Jones and Thomson written as S.J.T). An acronym is similar, but the letters can be pronounced as a word, for example NASA. Founder based names are simply company names that are (often) the surnames of the company founders. Initialisms and founder based names are neither memorable or interesting and lack creativity. They are often hard to pronounce and long winded, and do not overtly suggest qualities or positive perceptions.

# The naming brief

Before you begin generating name ideas for your company, complete this form to create a naming brief. Taking a naming brief will help you stay on the right track, uncover a name that speaks to your audience and creates the right impression for your company.

**It is very important that all decision makers see, agree upon and sign off on the brief before any name generation begins.**

## What is being named?

Briefly describe what it is you are naming. Is it a product, a service or a company?

## Who are the target audience?

Who is the target audience that your name should appeal to? How will they engage with your company, and what common traits and demographics do they share?

# What ideas should the name convey?

What themes, concepts or ideas do you want the name to convey? For example, are there any core principals or values surrounding your company that you want understood? Think about the broad ideas you want your name to allude to and try to distil these into single words or very short sentences. List three or four below, adding brief notes underneath each.

## Idea 1:

Notes:

## Idea 2:

Notes:

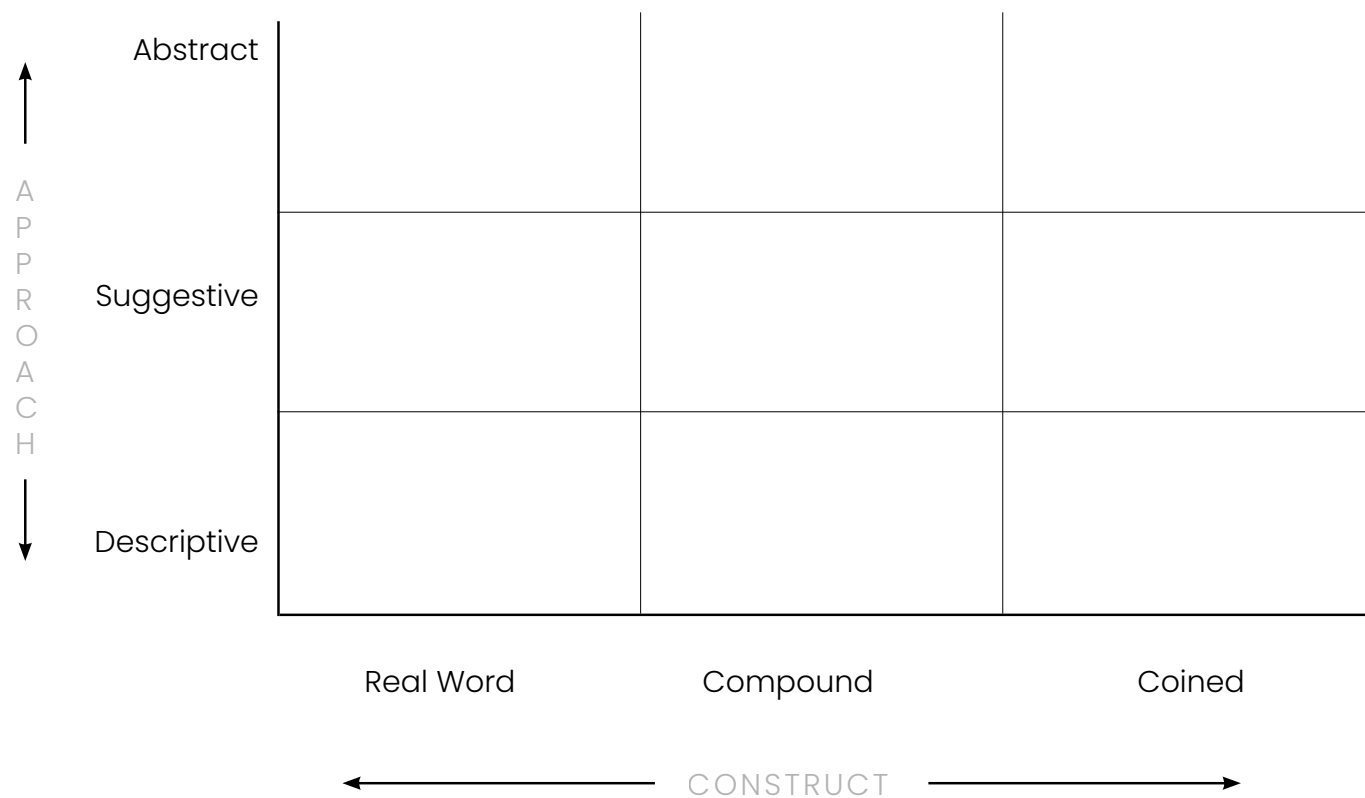
## Idea 3:

Notes:

## Idea 4:

Notes

# Naming approach and construct



## Naming approach and construct notes

At this point do you have a specific requirement for a descriptive name, or do you want something more abstract? Do you want to avoid initialisms or acronyms?

# Name tonality

This is different from the concepts and ideas your name will seek to convey, and is more to do with how the name sounds phonetically, and what kind of feeling it should evoke. If you have completed prior brand strategy exercises and defined your brand personality, this will play a part in the decisions around the tonality of your name. For example, think about how sharp and soft vowels can influence perceptions ([such as the Bouba and Kiki effect](#))

# Names of competitor firms



# Words or ideas to explore and avoid

Explore	Avoid

# Previously rejected ideas, names or concepts

If you are refining your brief, and you have previously rejected certain ideas, name or concepts, then list them here.

## Names you like

## Domain requirements

Almost all single-word .com domain names are taken, and any that are for sale can be very expensive. Consider whether you need a .com domain, or if you can utilise alternatives such as a hyphenated domain name, use prefixes or suffixes or [use a top level domain name](#) instead.

# Additional notes

# You're ready to generate names, but before you begin make sure...

- ☐ You're clear on the 'thing' that is being named, and you've discussed your target audience.
- ☐ You know what concepts and ideas to explore that you wish your brand to be understood for.
- ☐ Everyone who has a final say on the chosen name has read, understood and agreed to this brief.
- ☐ You are not distracted by the availability (or lack of) any particular domain at this stage.

## Strive for quantity in order to arrive at quality

Now you're ready to start generating your long-list of names. At this stage, you need to focus on quantity, before you focus on quality. Only through generating a long list of names can you short-list to a more refined list of suitable names.

**As you begin, remember there are no 'bad' names at the start of the process. Write everything down, and refine later on.**

## Exercises and approaches for name generation

Word maps based on your concepts, themes and areas of exploration  
Word maps generated by combining two or more concepts and themes  
Researching relevant topics  
Online research  
Combining two words to make a compound name  
Explore alternative spellings  
Using alliteration  
Rhyming  
Laddering exercises: Exploring the semantic relationships between words

If you find yourself in a creative rut, and inspiration is not forth-coming, then step away from the task. Do something completely different or even sleep on it. By giving yourself some time away you may be surprised with what you come up with subconsciously, when you're not 'actively' trying to think of names.

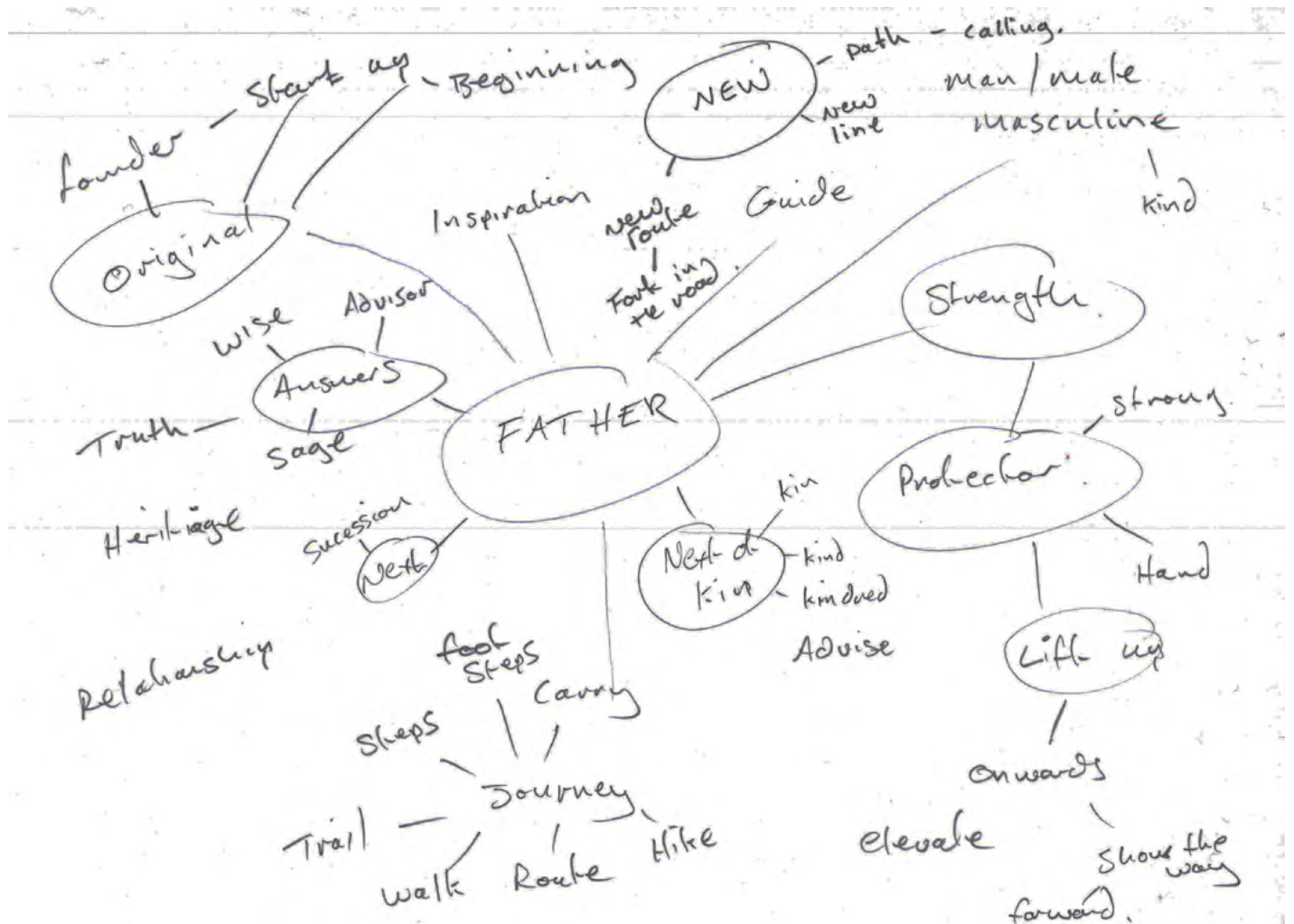
## Sources for naming inspiration

Dictionaries and Thesaurus	Music and lyrics
Etymological dictionary	Lists
Rhyming dictionary	Poems and literature
Historical figures	Foreign languages
Places	

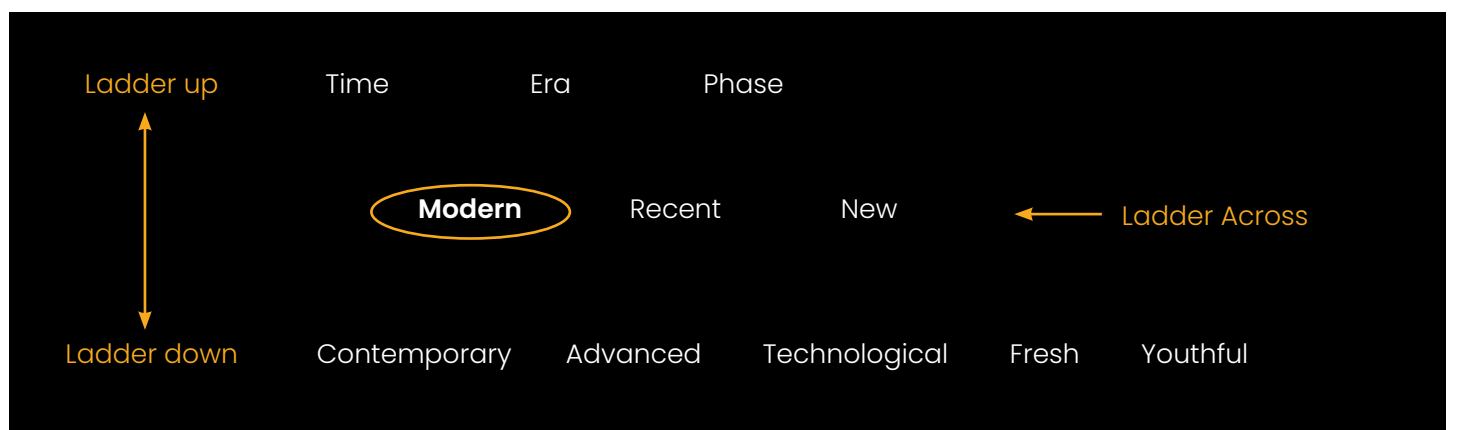
## Avoid online name generators

An online name generator does not ask you for a naming brief, nor does it understand your product or audience. They will output names within seconds that have little meaning and relevance, and they do not consider the qualities a good name should possess. Furthermore they do not consider the nuances of language, pronunciation or cultural sensibilities, and for this reason are best avoided.

**Word-mapping example using the word 'Father' as an area of exploration.**



**Laddering exercise using the word 'Modern' as an area of exploration.**

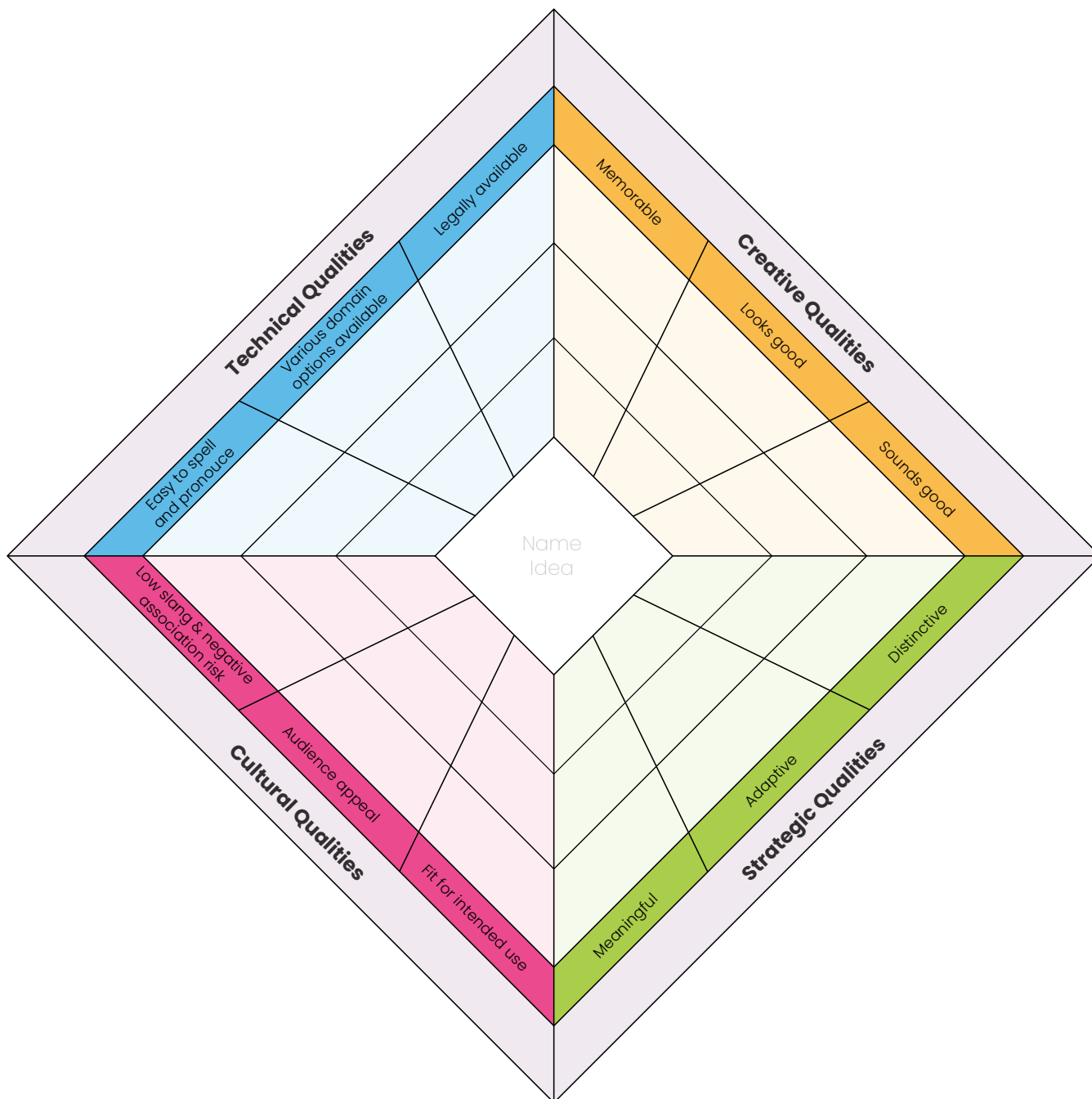


# Next steps: Tips on presenting your short-listed names

How do your short-listed names fare on the Qualities Diamond? Use the diamond opposite to gauge how well your names fulfil the different criteria. Follow the tips below as you make your decisions.

- **Don't fall in love with the first few names you come up with.**
- **Don't get distracted by the perceived lack of domain name availability at this stage. There are ways to circumnavigate the lack of an available .com domain name.**
- **Don't ask for opinions from outsiders early on (they will not be privy to your naming brief requirements).**
- **When you present your names, first remind your colleagues what the desired concepts and themes are that you want the name to allude to.**
- **Present all your names in the same way, as a simple word on the screen, or on a business card mock-up. Use the same font for each word you present.**
- **Don't be tempted to design logos or accompanying visual identities for each name, as this will create a bias towards a preferred font, colour scheme or design.**
- **When you present your names to the others in your organisation ask what names they like and why, instead of what names they don't like.**
- **Seek professional assistance when carrying out legal checks and screening.**





**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# This guide was brought to you by Prosper, a branding consultancy for professional service firms that don't want to look like the other firms...

My name is Ben Stanbury, I am the owner and director of Prosper. From my studio on the Essex / Suffolk border I work with clients world-wide delivering brand strategy, naming, brand identity design and website development.

I particularly like working with accountants, CPA's and consultants in the financial advice space, and those who recognise the role that clear branding and communication plays in an industry crowded by similar looking firms.

You can find more guides and resources, as well as a regular marketing blog on my website.

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